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# The role of school food service in promoting healthy eating at school – a perspective from an ad hoc group on nutrition in schools, Council of Europe

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## Abstract

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Changes in the eating habits of young people in Europe and the resulting growth in obesity and overweight are giving cause for concern. The Council of Europe in 2001 decided to establish an ad hoc group consisting of national experts to review the issues. Since then the group has studied current school food practices in Europe in order to be able to issue guidelines targeted at international, national, local and institutional levels. A survey was undertaken on behalf of the Council of Europe and World Health Organization (WHO, European Office) as a starting point. The study was an update of a previous survey carried out in the process of developing the ENHPS healthy eating in school manual and the results were presented at a forum held by the Council of Europe in collaboration with the WHO entitled *The European Forum on Eating at School – Making Healthy Choices* on the 20th and 21st November 2003. In addition, a number of experts from a range of professional backgrounds, all with a common interest in healthy eating in schools, were invited to present research results and discuss the way forward. The results from the forum have since been compiled into a forum report. The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the findings of the European Network of Health Promoting Schools group and its implications for school food service in the future; to discuss, in general, how schools can become a more active arena for the promotion of healthy eating, and how food service can contribute in this respect. The results present an overview of how food provision is organized in primary and secondary schools, at home, outside the school, lunch boxes, kiosk type outlets, vending machines, cash cafeterias and canteens as well as 'special food promotions'. Data on how school food is financed and operated are presented together with the findings on future consumer demand. The findings and their implications for school food service operators are discussed. Barriers include improving logistics, reviewing the healthiness of food provision, the use of vending machines, involving stakeholders, complying with standards, integrating food and nutrition issues in the curriculum and giving due attention to future consumer demands. In conclusion, the paper presents guidelines on healthy eating at school issued by the Council of Europe on the basis of the forum and the work done in the ad hoc group.

## Introduction

There is an increase in nutrition-related diseases in many countries. Globally, the incidence of obesity has risen over the past 30–40 years and in particular, the increasing incidence of overweight and obesity among

children and young people is of great concern. Data show that obesity among children is increasing throughout Europe and recent data from the UK demonstrate overweight (19%) and obesity (7%) in the 5-year-olds providing a clear indication of the need to initiate effective preventive measures (Reilly *et al.* 1999).

The cross-national study on The Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children (HBSC<sup>1</sup>) study (Currie *et al.* 2004) provides data on the eating habits and related behaviours of pupils aged 11, 13 and 15 years. Data from the HBSC study (Maes 2003) suggest that there are a significant number of young people who do not conform to current nutritional advice. Problems include low fruit and vegetable consumption, high consumption of soft drinks and the skipping of breakfast. The study also indicates that 'body dissatisfaction' and dieting are common and that a substantial number of young people in all countries do not meet the current recommended guidelines for physical activity. The study gives clear evidence of the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity in young people (Maes 2003).

One of the promising areas in which preventative strategies have been discussed and tested concern the efforts undertaken in schools. Approximately 115 million school-aged children attend school in pre-primary, primary and secondary education in Europe<sup>2</sup> (Anonymous 2003) and intervention here has, therefore, the potential to reach a significant number of individuals, because students spend 5 days a week, for 9–13 years at school. Improving food, diet and nutrition at schools can constitute an important element in a strategy towards healthier eating among children and adolescents.

Good nutrition contributes to the improved well-being of children and their potential learning ability, thus contributing to better school performance (Blades 2001; Pérez-Rodrigo & Aranceta 2001) and there is evidence that poor nutrition in schoolchildren tends to compromise learning capacity (Tompkins 1998; Moore 1999). Several literature reviews have found that well-designed and well-implemented school-based programmes can improve the physical activity and eating behaviours of young people (Contento *et al.* 1995; Resnicow & Robinson 1997).

Against this background, the Council of Europe<sup>3</sup> in 2001 initiated expert work to be carried out in the field of nutrition in schools. Schools have been the target for a number of projects focusing on health and nutrition issues and a substantial amount of evidence exists on school-aged children's health behaviour from the HBSC study. The same applies for the experiences from the European Network of Health Promoting Schools<sup>4</sup> in its use of the manual *Healthy Eating for Young People in*

*Europe – A School-based Nutrition Education Guide* (Dixey *et al.* 1999)

## Aim

The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the findings of the European expert group and their implications for school food service in the future and how schools can become a more active area for the promotion of healthy eating and how food service can contribute in this respect.

## Methods

A group of experts in nutrition from the member states of the Council's Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field was established to carry out the work and the World Health Organization (WHO) was invited to participate in the process. A survey based on a questionnaire was undertaken on behalf of the Council of Europe and the WHO, regional office for Europe, as a starting point.

The objectives of the survey were to update the 1997 European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS) on nutrition education<sup>4</sup> which was undertaken in 15 European countries (Currie *et al.* 2004). The survey aimed to explore the provision of food in schools across Europe, to find out how food provision is linked with nutrition education in primary and secondary schools and to study the extent to which the provision of food and nutrition education are embedded in the Whole School<sup>5</sup> Approach. A questionnaire was developed by a task force established under the ad hoc group and was designed using the former survey as a blueprint. The questionnaire was then field tested in Denmark and the Netherlands.

The survey should also function as a basis for discussion among stakeholders of the different European countries at the Forum.

In the questionnaire, a distinction was made between primary schools for pupils aged 5–12 years and second-

<sup>1</sup><http://www.hbsc.org>

<sup>2</sup>Calculated for the 45 Member states of Council of Europe.

<sup>3</sup>Council of Europe (COE) has 45 member states and the Partial agreement in the Social and Public Health field has 19 member states. The ad hoc group on Nutrition in schools group reports to Expert Committee on Nutrition, Food and Consumer health.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/cahru/projects/enhps.html#healthyeating>

<sup>5</sup>An approach to health promotion in schools that is not only focused on the formal curriculum, but which also integrates the wider aspects of school life such as school/parental links, school/community links, food provision, the school environment and policies for healthy eating. This approach recognizes that one cannot only look at nutrition in isolation to understand an issue such as obesity or being underweight for that matter. Other issues such as physical activity levels, social factors, emotional health, smoking behaviours or genetic predisposition are examples of other issues which may be inter-linked in relation to an outcome such as being overweight or underweight.

ary schools with pupils aged 12–16 years.<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire was sent to co-ordinators for the national Health Promoting Schools Network in all 45 member states who were asked to consult other specialists in education, nutrition and catering to assist with responses (de Boer 2003).

Coordinators from twenty-six countries reported back: Albania, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK (Scotland, Wales and England).

The results from the study were presented (de Boer 2003) at a forum held by the Council of Europe in collaboration with the WHO entitled *European Forum on Eating at School – Making Healthy Choices*, from 20 to 21 November 2003 convening 178 participants from 27 countries (Council of Europe 2003). A number of experts from the multidisciplinary fields related to nutrition in schools were invited to present research results and discuss the way forward. Delegates at the Forum were invited from all the member states of the Council of Europe and also included The European Commission, the WHO Regional Office for Europe, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and school students from the Young Minds project (Jensen 2003).

The aims of the Forum were to discuss healthy eating in schools as an integral part of healthy lifestyles, as well, as to review different European approaches to the provision of food in schools. In addition, the Forum aimed to make proposals for follow-up activities to be pursued by the Council of Europe.

A special focus of the Forum was to get an insight into the expectations and demands of students. Therefore students, recruited through the Young Minds project<sup>7</sup>, were invited to work on a separate session to develop their vision on food and nutrition in school.

## Results

Results show considerable diversity in terms of the way food provision in schools is organized, how it is financed and how it is operated. This is partly a result of different food traditions and different educational traditions in countries.

<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that the exact age ranges vary considerably within Europe.

<sup>7</sup>An international project carried out within the ENHPS for special events and used for developing interactive learning using ICT. Council of Europe, European Commission and WHO, Regional Office for Europe, jointly support ENHPS.

## How food provision is organized

The survey indicated that in most countries the provision of food is organized by the school, but that it is not a statutory requirement in all countries. In some countries, the school plays only a facilitating role in providing facilities and time for eating. In a number of countries, there is a long tradition of providing school meals whereas in other countries, no such tradition exists.

In some cases, there is a clear national policy concerning eating at school whereas the implementation is the responsibility of the local authorities. In others, for example, many of the federal countries, decisions concerning school food provision are the responsibility of regional government. In some, no national or regional policy exists and thus it is the responsibility of the individual school to make appropriate arrangements.

According to the survey, the ways of providing food ranges from traditional school meals, cash cafeterias and the provision of basic facilities where pupils can eat a packed lunch, to providing no basic facilities at all. In most cases, there are differences in the way food provision is planned and organized in primary and secondary schools.

In primary schools, food is mainly provided in the form of traditional school meal systems or packed lunches (lunch boxes). In addition, special programmes for school milk and fruit and vegetables are common.

In secondary schools, there is a wider variety in food provision systems. In addition to the traditional school meals and packed lunches, students can also get food from cash cafeterias, vending machines and to a lesser degree from kiosks (tuck shops). Special programmes for school milk or fruit and vegetables are not as common as in primary schools.

An overview of different ways that food can be provided is given below. It should not be viewed as a rigid classification, but indicative of the variety of European food provision. The different options are listed in order of increasing involvement of the school.

### Eating outside school

#### *Eating at home*

In parts of some countries such as Spain and Belgium, there is a food culture in which having lunch together as a family is important and students have a lunch break that allows them sufficient time to go home for lunch. In most other countries, though, this option is of little significance.

#### *Eating outside the school*

Provision of food in school, in many cases, competes with outside school food options such as supermarkets,

snack bars and fast food outlets. However, in most cases, access to such outside alternatives at lunch breaks is allowed only for older students. The importance of eating outside the school is influenced by the proximity of such alternatives and the time available for lunch.

### Eating at school

#### *Lunch boxes (packed lunches)*

Lunch boxes with cold food is the basic way in which food is provided. In most cases, they are prepared at home and do not involve the school or the school food service operator. In some countries, special areas or facilities are provided but in others, such as most schools in Denmark, no basic facilities are provided hence children eat in their classroom. Although lunch boxes are normally brought from home, some are provided at school either subsidized or as a commercial product. Lunch boxes can contain a variety of foods, i.e. open sandwiches, sandwiches, salads and snacks.

#### *Kiosk type outlets (tuck shops)*

Many schools run a facility in which cold and simple types of food are sold. Normally no seating is available in these facilities and they are sometimes referred to as a tuck shop (although this term seems to be disappearing as it was traditionally associated with the provision of high-sugar and/or high-fat snacks). Minimal preparation takes place in such facilities which serve mainly as a point of sale. Such outlets are operated either by a food service operator, by students or other organizations. Kiosk type outlets are common in most countries even in cases where more organized school food provision takes place

#### *Vending machines*

Automated devices for food and drinks – normally referred to as vending machines – can be found in most countries although the existence of these machines differs considerably between primary and secondary schools. Soft drinks are the most common item sold, but snacks and in some cases prepared foods are also found. In primary schools, vending machines for soft drinks are only allowed in a few cases in the majority of countries. In secondary schools, there is a much higher presence of soft drink vending machines. Vending is most commonly operated by a food service operator or by students or their organizations.

#### *Cash cafeterias and canteens*

The survey showed that in a number of countries, such as in Finland, Sweden, Scotland, England and France, a hot school meal is provided in a systematic and orga-

nized way. In these countries, food is provided from a counter which normally includes a choice between different options, or in a canteen setting with a set menu. Seating is available in both cases although takeaway is also an option. The layout can be either free flow or in-line. The facilities can be run by the school or contracted out to a private operator. In the case of cash cafeterias and canteens, meals can be prepared on site or they can be prepared in central kitchens and subsequently transported to the serving site.

The primary practise of school food provision centres around lunch, but that food provision also includes snacks in some countries. In addition, breakfast programmes are found, for example, in rural areas, where students may have to start their school journey very early. Breakfast programmes are also offered for socially disadvantaged groups in some countries.

In countries which traditionally have a short school day (<5 hours), some operate school clubs in which students can spend the afternoon in additional supervised classes. In these countries, the school and the afterschool activity may be more or less integrated but together they may form a 'whole day school'. This trend towards longer school days necessitates that food provision is even more essential and the current project underlines the need to apply healthy eating objectives to these types of food provision.

In addition to the more traditional food provision, a number of 'special food promotions' operate in some countries, for example, fruit and vegetables. The reason for this is the low intake of fruit and vegetables among schoolchildren, which is one of the significant problems with the diet of young people. The existing infrastructure of systems such as cafeterias and tuck shops are used in many cases to help with the introduction of these programmes and in others, alternative systems are used. In 13 countries, special school programmes were reported and in the majority of these, interventions are aimed at primary schools.

Pilot programmes, offering fruit and vegetables during school breaks, are in existence in many countries. In some, such as in the Netherlands, programmes are pilot projects targeting groups of schools in one part of the country. In others, such as Scotland and Norway, they have established programmes for all schools and still others such as in Lithuania, ample portions of fruit and vegetables are part of the hot meals. In addition to the fruit and vegetable schemes, school milk programmes are in operation in many countries.

A number of different issues affect student choice as to whether to eat in the school or the alternatives outside school. These issues include the physical environment and ambience of the dining area, for example,

the provision of music, the duration of lunch breaks, the proximity of outside alternatives and length of queues. The attitudes and involvement of teachers and other staff to school dining may also be influential. Other social factors such as the views and decisions of friends and attitudes of parents, especially with younger children, the cost of the meals, the size of portions and the attractiveness of the choices, are also important.

#### How school food service is financed

The financing of food provision is an important issue and the survey gives data on how this is undertaken. In some countries, subsidies are provided to operate the food provision and in others, subsidies are used only to make healthy food choices more attractive. There are also examples of project funding being made available for the development of new innovative models for school food provision.

Subsidies can be given at national, regional, local or school level. Many countries report that low funding is a major barrier to implementing healthy nutrition in schools and those subsidies for food provision could be an incentive to start such programmes.

Ten countries including Sweden, Finland, Spain and Poland reported having their daily school meals subsidized for all children. For example, in Finland, municipalities are responsible for education and receive funds from the national budget to do this. In addition, municipalities collect local taxes, which are used for education, including the provision of meals in schools. Some countries only subsidize meals for socio-economically disadvantaged groups as in Lithuania and the UK.

Programmes for milk, fruit and vegetables are subsidized in 12 countries. For example, in the Netherlands free fruit and vegetable provision for primary schools is subsidized by the European Union, the Ministry of Health and the fruit and vegetables producers. However, these responses might not reflect hidden subsidies, such as the time and costs of food preparation, kitchen maintenance and other overhead costs, which do not always form a part of the meal costs.

#### How school food service is operated

The successful operation of food provision in schools is dependant on the involvement of a number of different stakeholders and the survey indicates who these stakeholders are and how they participate. Important stakeholders include school management, teachers, school food service professionals, contract caterers, parents and, most importantly, the students themselves. At a policy level, government ministries, authorities,

food producers and local authorities are important players.

Close cooperation between different stakeholders is extremely important if school food provision is to be operated successfully and here, the notion of partnerships is an important element. The survey findings suggest that these partnerships have been growing in importance in the last decade and that they are evolving into more committed and sustained forms of cooperation. The partnerships include:

- development contracts between commercial or private food providers and public schools;
- product development of healthy foods by industry;
- development of school fruit programmes;
- nutrition action teams or school nutrition action groups;
- development of school breakfast clubs;
- healthy eating development projects involving different stakeholders at school level.

Students and parents are important stakeholders in relation to school food provision. In some countries, students participate in planning meals together with the food service operator and in others, they participate in the operation of the facilities or perform logistical tasks.

#### What consumers demand

Consumers' perspectives have been an important theme in the project and data from the project have been discussed by students who were actively involved through the Young Minds/ENHPS. Students participated interactively in the Forum activities expressing their views and contributing to the debate. The following summarizes the vision of the students:

- Lunch at school should be served in one big dining room with music.
- To be able to sit the entire lunch time, if you wish, allowing you to enjoy your food and take your time over it!!
- Food should be set out in the form of a buffet thus covering a wide range of food that doesn't necessarily all have to be healthy.
- Some food could be stodgy so pupils learn to make the right decisions themselves!!
- There should be a new foreign food everyday to make the food varied and more exciting!!
- Pupils should also be allowed to request favourite meals, so that they are participating in the decisions!
- Fruit and water should be given out free in class and allowed to be consumed during the lessons.
- Healthy eating lessons should be compulsory thereby enabling students to learn the importance of food



choice as well as putting the theory into practice. It would also encourage pupils to take healthy eating beyond the school and into the real world enabling others to be taught, and most importantly, bringing up their children to do the same.

- Students should 'work' as canteen helpers, and they should be educated in healthy eating and food safety.

## Discussion

The outcomes of the Council of Europe Forum have important implications for different stakeholders in the school environment.

### Improving logistics

The results clearly show that logistical factors are important for the promotion of healthy eating practices and for the success of school food provision. Too much waiting in line is a widespread phenomenon and therefore, innovative approaches to healthy eating must take account of these barriers (Young 2004). In many cases, food service operators can improve logistics with the help of free flow serving designs and signs that speed up service. Modern fast food concepts offer some ideas as to how this can be done. Logistics are especially important because the results indicate that too short a break for lunch is a widespread problem in school life. Logistics must also take into account the youngest children and their special needs.

In many cases, such conditions are beyond the control of the food service operator alone hence other stakeholders must be involved. This is also the case for the eating environment which is important for school food provision because food has an important social function. The dining environment should allow students to enjoy their meal in pleasant surroundings and to remember that the environment includes not only the dining room but vending machines, water dispensers and other food and drink outlets in the school.

### Considerations in the use of vending machines

A special concern relates to the use of vending machines because such devices have become associated with unhealthy eating and drinking habits. The introduction of vending machines in schools has opened up different issues for debate. First, there is the nutritional point of view. If the vending machine is used to sell high-sugar/high-fat snacks and high-sugar soft drinks, it will have adverse nutritional implications. Second, there is the issue of advertising and marketing in schools, an issue over which many nutritionists and health educators express reservations. Third, sales from vending

machines may generate additional income for the school. These issues could be turned to a more positive advantage. Vending machines, as well as cafeterias and tuck shops, could offer more healthy food products, as in the UK for example, where vending machines are stocked with water and other healthy drinks instead of the fizzy ones (Young 2004). In Scotland, companies are not allowed to advertise their products on the machine fascia if it is in the main dining area and restrictions on the content of such machines are being encouraged.

### Reviewing healthiness of food provision

It is clear that it is not the responsibility for the food service operator alone to take responsibility for healthy eating in school. It is important to realize that food provision plays an important role but that there is a growing awareness in many countries that the school should play a more active role in promoting healthy eating through the provision of food (Heindl 2003). Teachers, school management, health professionals are important stakeholders as well and should be involved in healthy food provision initiatives.

In many countries where organized school food provision is not common, there are attempts at a local or national level to explore organized food provision at school as part of a strategy to promote healthy eating and fight overweight and obesity. Such food provision systems are seen in many countries as an alternative to less healthy options outside school. Thus it is important for food service operators to realize that they have to compete with outside alternatives including fast food outlets and that organized school food provision is distinct in that it can play an active role as a part of healthy eating concepts.

Food service operators also have an important role to play in actively promoting fruit and vegetables as healthier alternatives (Aarum 2003). Instead of such programmes being separate, they should be integrated into the daily food related routines of the school: but school food provision might also be increasing in importance for other reasons. For example, changing lifestyles of working parents across Europe and the decline in the number of family meals taken at home in many countries are important social trends that result in an increase in the relative importance of food provision in schools (Young *et al.* 2005).

### Considerations in pricing policies

Pricing policy is an important issue in school food provision. School food is only supplied at a subsidized

price or free of charge in a few cases (de Boer 2003). Therefore, the price charged for meals has to reflect the cost of ingredients and preparation. The pricing policy is important in relation to healthier eating because in many cases, school food outlets have become dependant on the selling of high-profit, often unhealthy foods and drinks, which may undermine the promotion of healthy eating.

#### Paying attention to future consumer demands

School food seems to be changing quickly because of new consumer demands who in this context could be regarded as both the students and parents. Important trends in consumer demand include healthy options in school and the demand for new solutions that can help busy families with convenient school meals.

In some countries, including Denmark, Norway and Iceland, the traditional lunch box brought from home is under attack because its preparation is time-consuming (Mikkelsen 2003) which itself opens up new business opportunities for food service operators and for industry. Furthermore, in some countries, traditional well-established systems are challenged by new consumer demands. These countries experience decreased support and demand as alternatives take an increased market share and for their food service operators this means a strong need for innovative approaches to school meals.

#### Involving stakeholders

Involving all stakeholders in nutrition and food provision at school is important and food service operators have a key role to play here (Coudyser 2003). Other important stakeholders include parents, young people and NGOs as well as food suppliers and food producers (Chauliac 2003). Important questions to be answered include how solutions can be developed in a participatory approach and how multidisciplinary cooperation across the school environment can be developed (Mikkelsen 2003). The central involvement of young people is vital and this poses dilemmas that have to be resolved as choice of food is a key issue for young people (Melotte & Content 2003). It will be essential to make the healthy choices as easy and attractive as possible.

Also at local authority, community and school level, a great deal more could be done. For example, it is important to identify local expertise in the school community and utilizing or setting up school action groups which could include school management, pupils, catering services, parents, dieticians, local food growers and providers (Young *et al.* 2004)

#### Complying with standards

In many countries, standards for the nutritional composition of meals, as well as recommendations at a food level, are in effect and some countries are currently working on new policies. In general, nutritional standards are recognized as playing an important role in promoting healthy eating in schools at national, regional and school levels. It is important to propose measures and practical tools for communities to facilitate the adoption and implementation of healthy eating guidelines in their schools. It is also important for school food service operators to be aware of such regulatory issues because food service operators are key players in ensuring that meals meet nutritional standards. Food service operators must be able to interpret the requirements in order to communicate these standards to consumers. These issues have important implications for the training of food service staff.

#### Integrating food and nutrition issues in the curriculum

The curriculum is normally beyond the influence of food service operators. However, it is important to realize that there are important links between the promotion of healthy eating through meals and food and nutrition related activities in the classroom. Provision of healthy food should go hand in hand with teaching about this issue. The goal should be that all young people leave school with the necessary knowledge and skills in relation to the purchasing, preparation, cooking and enjoyment of healthy food. In many countries, nutrition education, which young people receive, is variable and they may leave school without the necessary life skills in relation to healthy eating. This is an issue, which requires addressing, but unfortunately subjects such as home economics, which have traditionally played an important role in this work, have been in decline.

An important contextual question is the issue of how nutrition can become embedded in a broader framework. In some countries, innovative work has been carried out aimed at educating young people through visits to farms and food processing plants. Such projects aim to give students the skills to become discerning consumers in relation to food, its production and the impact on the environment. These activities could be included as an integral part of consumer education also covering wider ecological issues such as the energy costs of food production and supply.

#### Conclusions

The next steps in the Council of Europe initiative include several courses of action. The task force have



developed guidelines (Council of Europe 2003) that recommend governments to:<sup>8</sup>

1 review the practices of food provision in school to determine the extent to which these practices (or the absence of these practices) are compliant with, or an integral part of, a health promoting school approach;  
2 consider the elaboration of national provisions and nutritional standards for the provision of food in schools that:

- acknowledge the changing health status and lifestyles of young people in Europe;
- take into account good practices in the provision of healthy food in schools in Europe as demonstrated at the European Forum on *Eating at School*;
- contribute to the promotion of health of young people;
- involve pupils and all stakeholders in this process;
- are integrated into the health promoting school approach;
- have inbuilt systems of monitoring and evaluation.

3 consider the development of facilitating measures at national and regional level to support schools in the adoption and implementation of policies for healthy eating. These measures could include start-up resource support, practical tools for the implementation and the development of quality assessment systems.

The appendix to the guidelines suggests that the National provisions should be wide in scope and the following list provides examples of issues that could be addressed; thus, governments should take measures to:

- develop nutritional standards;
- promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables as snacks and as an important part of meals;
- ensure the provision of healthy alternatives for drinks such as fresh water, low-fat or fat-free milk;
- reduce the consumption of products high in sugar, salt and fats;
- actively manage the eating environment including not only the dining room but also vending machines and other food and drink outlets;
- establish pricing policies;
- develop policies concerning in-school marketing of food and beverages;
- actively involve parents, young people and other stakeholders in the planning process;
- utilize information technology to facilitate healthy choices;

<sup>8</sup>The full text in the preamble is '... Recommends that the governments of the member states of the Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field, based on the measures contained in the appendix and having due regard to their specific constitutional structures, national, regional or local circumstances, as well as economic, social, cultural and technical conditions.

- work with food producers and food service operators on specific healthy products;
- consider issues relating to sustainability, waste and the environment;
- review the associated curriculum on healthy eating to ensure that all young people leave school with the necessary knowledge and skills in relation to the production, purchasing, preparation, cooking and enjoyment of healthy food;
- review the in-service training needs of all those involved in food production, food preparation, and the associated curriculum in schools;
- identify the partners and stakeholders including NGOs who have a specific role to play and proposing mechanisms to facilitate this;
- consider links between the promotion of healthy eating in school and the health promoting school approach;
- propose sustainable mechanisms to monitor and evaluate any changes as a result of new policies;
- ensure that while the reduction of obesity is a major goal, no young person is hungry or undernourished at school;
- develop practical tools to support communities in the implementation of healthy eating provisions in their schools 'actively managing the eating environment including not only the dining room but vending machines and other food and drink outlets.

Finally the task force is preparing and publishing scientific review papers to motivate policy makers and practitioners, to consider the role they can play in promoting healthy choices in school food provision and to discuss and carry out the necessary changes, and to stimulate debate on ideas for change. A forum report is being published and the outcomes will be communicated in the press through a press release and associated fact sheets. In due course, it is hoped that, subject to the approval of the Committee of experts on Nutrition and consumer health and the Public health committee of the Council of Europe, The Council of Ministers will consider a formal resolution for all member states on this issue. The health of more than 100 million young people in Europe is a vital resource and must be protected. It is believed that this initiative can make a major contribution to the health promotion of Europe's young people as European countries are now realizing the scale of the problem and the types of measures required to stimulate change.

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### Editor's note

*The role food and nutrition play in schools is not a new subject and many academics have worked in this area for a number of years.*

*What is perhaps encouraging from this paper by Mikkelsen and co-workers is that the profile of the entire subject has now been raised and features in an international setting.*

*We must hope that this continues and that the food service industry, in its broadest context, has the opportunity to play a full role.*

JSAB

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